

COMMONSENSE MEASURES TO CURB GUN VIOLENCE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. EHRLICH) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. EHRLICH. Mr. Speaker, just a few thoughts on the events taking place on the floor in the last few days.

Mr. Speaker, I and most of us support the rights of law-abiding citizens to possess guns for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is self-defense. This view derives from my observation that many gun control initiatives have proven a failure in reducing crime.

For example, in the case of the Colorado shootings, the two criminals responsible for the carnage broke 19 State and Federal laws in the preparation and commission of those crimes.

Some of my constituents have written to me about gun control proposals which seek to limit gun owners to purchasing one gun a month and a minimum 3-day waiting period. Previously, waiting periods were necessary in order to allow for background checks to be completed. The passage of the Brady bill in 1994 brought new computerized national and local criminal arrest records. The criminal background of a potential gun purchaser can now be verified in a matter of minutes through the National Instant Check System, the NICS. I believe the background investigation as initiated through the NICS is a reasonable check on gun ownership rights.

I support some new proposals brought to this floor over the past two days, as well. For instance, I do not believe juveniles convicted of serious violent crimes should be allowed to acquire guns even after they turn 21 years of age. I support the imposition of harsh penalties for adults who provide guns to juveniles with the knowledge those guns will be used in a crime of violence.

I support programs which trace the source of firearms used in the commission of a crime. Convicted felons found in the possession of any gun should be punished severely, with mandatory minimum sentences that cannot be plea-bargained away.

Further, I welcome positive changes to current law that allow current and former police officers to carry weapons to protect themselves and our communities, prohibit guns pawned for more than a year from being returned until the owner passes an instant check, and allow D.C. residents the right to protect and defend themselves and their families in their own homes.

National crime statistics reflect an 18 percent decrease in violent crime and a 28 percent decrease in the murder rate from 1993 through 1997. The downward trend continued through June of 1998. I attribute a significant percentage of this improvement to the increased use of mandatory sentencing

for violent offenders. Accordingly, I will continue to insist on harsh penalties for violent criminals, particularly those who misuse weapons during the commission of a crime.

Further, I call upon prosecutors everywhere to refrain from pleading away gun-related charges and criminal indictments. Sensible gun laws do work, but not when rendered meaningless by overburdened prosecutors more interested in moving their docket than in enforcing gun statutes.

Mr. Speaker, in my view the primary causes of gun violence in our society are rather obvious. The breakdown of families and family values, failure to hold individuals accountable for their actions, the romanticizing and glorifying of drug abuse, and violent behavior and guns on television, at the movies, and in video arcade are all relevant in assigning blame for recent events pertaining to youth violence.

Youth access to guns plays a part in the total picture, as well. Accordingly, I will continue to support measures restricting youth access to guns, criminal access to guns, and the mentally impaired and their access to guns.

I will not punish responsible. Law-abiding gun owners who are often made scapegoats by special interests and some segments of the popular press, and Members are going to see a heck of a lot of that over the coming days.

If gun control was the sole answer to the problem of violence in our country, my home State of Maryland, which has some of the strongest gun control laws in the country, would not have experienced an increased murder rate in 1998 while the national murder rate continued to fall.

The thoughts expressed herein do not make for an easy sound bite. Neither do they fall neatly under one political or philosophical label. They state, however, the views of one Member from Maryland who seeks to find positive solutions to one of our society's major ills, our fascination with violence.

THE DISASTROUS WAR IN YUGOSLAVIA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. DUNCAN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. DUNCAN. Mr. Speaker, fairly early on during the war in Yugoslavia I spoke on this floor and said it was obvious that Milosevic would cave and that President Clinton and his spin doctors would then try to declare a great victory. It was obvious that a country no bigger than Kentucky, with less than 4 percent of our population and an already weakened economy, and without any real ability even to fight back, could not hold out for long against the massive bombings and megabillions of the U.S. Defense Department.

The only reason this stupid, one-sided cruel joke of a war lasted as long as it did was because it became, as one columnist said, and allied farce instead of an allied force, as the military called it.

Jeffrey Gedmin, writing in the just published June 28 issue of the liberal New Republic Magazine, said this:

If the deal between Yugoslavia and NATO over Kosovo sticks, expect the Clinton administration to claim vindication and to speak of a victory for American leadership via NATO. But Europe's own early post-mortem suggests that our allies might be drawing rather different conclusions.

Privately, politically influential Europeans generally consider the U.S.-led operation in Kosovo to have been a fiasco. Calculations of an early victory proved disastrously wrong. The Kosovars, whom we started the fighting to protect, have been decimated. There were 90,000 refugees before the bombing began. Estimates of the homeless now exceed 1 million.

Mr. Gedmin ended his article by calling it a pyrrhic victory, meaning really no victory at all. Columnist Robert Novak said the same thing. He wrote,

But the truly pyrrhic nature of NATO's victory lies in longer-term implications. Serious students of foreign policy, far from eager to join in a champagne bash, were melancholy. U.S. relations with China have been undermined. The most dangerous elements in the Russian military have been emboldened. Most worrisome, the world now sees America with different eyes.

Former Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger said, "We looked like the big bully to a lot of people around the world."

Senator KAY BAILEY HUTCHINSON said that we are in danger of losing prestige and good will around the world. Under this administration, we have bombed people in Afghanistan, the Sudan, Iraq, and Yugoslavia, all apparently in an attempt to show that the President and the Secretary of State are great world leaders, and to make their mark in history.

Paul Harvey called this war Monica's war, and many people believe all these bombings in Afghanistan, the Sudan, Iraq, and Yugoslavia, timed as they were, were at least in part done to try to make people forget things like the sordid Lewinsky affair and the President's sale of missile technology to the Chinese.

Columnist Tony Snow said that this was the first war we have ever entered into in which we were the unambiguous aggressor and in which there was no vital U.S. interests at stake. In the process, the President turned NATO from a purely defensive force into an offensive one for the very first time, illegally many think, because it was against the NATO charter. He turned our Defense Department into a war department, as it was once called. He violated both our constitutional law and our statutory law, the War Powers Act. But then, some people do not care as long as the stock market remains high.